Floored by the choice: carpet or wood?

When I first walked into the downstairs master bedroom of the house, D.C. and I are buying, I said, as if stating something as obvious as fish need water: “We’d have to change the carpet in here to hard wood.”

“Why? The carpet isn’t bad,” D.C. says.

I look at him as if he’s grown a trunk. The certainty that we needed to put wood floors in this room was as clear to me as the certainty that we didn’t need this extra expense was to him.

“The whole downstairs is wood,” I say, again stating the obvious. “Why stop here?”

“A lot of people carpet their bedrooms,” he says. “I was ticked off.”

“That’s her ick nose,” D.C. tells Wendy, our agent, who is not far behind.

“The trick will be getting it to match,” I say, moving beyond the question of whether and onto whom. I ask Wendy if she can find out from the sellers who installed the wood floors originally.

“What about the carpeting upstairs?” D.C. asks warily.

“We can leave it,” I say, to his relief. It, too, is in good condition and an agreeable color. “For now” I feel my nose crinkle again.

“What do you have against carpet?” he asks. It’s a valid question.

The carpet or wood debate has been going on for decades, at least as far back as when the early settlers dragged bear skins home to their log cabins, where the pioneer women said, “Do you have any idea how much dust is in this hide?”

Four hundred years later, the debate has come to my new home.

See, in my perfect house, which does not exist, all floors except bathrooms and laundry rooms would be wood. I pine for wood floors, because they’re classic, timeless, natural, durable, easy to clean, sustainable, renewable and go with everything.

I know. I can hear you carpet lovers shouting out the merits of your favorite flooring of choice. (What fun would this column be if everyone agreed with me?) I know you’re itching to point out that carpet is cushy underfoot, comes in infinite colors and textures, buffers noise, is softer for kids to play on and costs a heck of a lot less than wood.

All true, and the cost difference is considerable. When you factor in labor and materials, wood floors cost two to four times more than carpet. In other words, once you buy wood floors, you may never be able to order two topings on your pizza again.

D.C. and I are not alone in this debate. Floor wars are being fought in homes across America, and the two sides are in a dead heat. While carpet used to be far more popular, it has lost ground (sorry) over the last 30 years to hard-floor coverings of all type. Today just 51 percent of floors in U.S. homes are carpeted, according to industry experts.

Floored by options — When deciding where to install hardwood flooring rather than carpet, consider the family room, dining room and kitchen first. The second most important area is the master bedroom.

Wendy gets the name of the flooring company that installed our new home’s floors 13 years ago. I call, and am relieved to find not only that the company is still in business, but also that the owner remembers the house.

Dave Erikstrup, owner of Specialty Floor Designs, of Longwood, Florida, meets me at the new house for an estimate. He assures me he can match the original blond oak floors, and their natural finish. He also tells me “a lot more homeowners want wood in their master. I get about two calls a week from customers like you who want to swap out the carpet there for wood.”

If you can afford wood throughout your home, or you don’t want to over improve your house for the neighborhood, try having wood installed only in the family room and kitchen, and carpet secondary bedrooms and living rooms, he suggests.

Here are more reasons to fall for wood floors, along with what’s trending:

- A natural connection. Wood floors provide an instant connection to nature.

- Added character. Over time, wood subly changes color. Small scratches and nicks from high heels and pet claws add to its appeal.

- Stronger and more authentic. Despite shifts in trends, wood floors work with every color and can easily handle different decor styles. To change a wood floor’s look, change the area rug.

- Function. Wood floors work almost everywhere, except in damp areas. In bathrooms, I like natural stone, such as limestone or travertine, and in mud and laundry rooms, I prefer tile.

- Longevity. Hardwood floors can last hundreds of years with proper care and periodic refinishing. A top-quality carpet lasts about 10 to 15 years. Thus, hardwood may prove more economical over time.

- Cleanliness. Hardwood’s smooth, solid surface makes it easier to clean spills, dust, pet hair, crumbs and debris. This same dirt can cling to carpet fibers, aggravating allergies and making homes less hygienic.

- Shades of gray. Trending in today’s wood-floor market is gray flooring, from dark to light shades, said Erikstrup. Customers also want wider, lighter planks, in flat, not gloss, finishes. Light wood, or blond, flooring is also popular, and dark walnut is always in style.


How Big a Gamble Is a Condemned Home?

It could be the deal of a lifetime or your client’s worst nightmare. But just because a house has been condemned doesn’t mean it can’t be a fit for buyers who don’t mind a little risk.

First off, it’s important to understand the definition. A condemned property is simply one that the government has taken over from a private owner, according to Desare Kohn-Laski, broker and owner of Strye Louis Realty in Coconut Creek, Fla. This can happen for a number of reasons: if the home has stood vacant (typically for more than 60 days), utilities must be discontinued, or an inspector discovers specific hazards. “You certainly can buy it. In some cases, you may need to tear down an existing structure and start over. In others, you can make changes to the property that are in compliance with the city’s codes, thus ‘lifting’ its condemned status,” she says.

Condemned homes often sell for little more than the value of the land, which may amount to just a few thousand dollars. That means your clients may be able to rehab the house and then increase its value significantly.

But these transactions may take more time to navigate, since you usually must work with a bank or the government to purchase a condemned property. Buyers will need to know what or if any violations or liens are attached to the property’s title.

Financing can be a hang-up for some buyers looking to go this route. Most traditional lenders only lend based on the condition of the property as it currently exists,” Christy Murdoch Edgar, a real estate practitioner in Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C., told realtor.com®.

“There may be many costs associated with rehabbing a condemned property that aren’t covered by the lending process.”

Buyers may need to consult a private lender to structure a loan based on the property after rehabbing it so they can combine demo and construction costs into one lump sum. Or, buyers can set up a short-term loan if the intent is to flip the property.

Certainly there are plenty of risks purchasing a condemned home, and it’s possible the cost of restoring the home could be higher than the value of the house itself. “If it was due to severe structural or repair issues, you might end up losing a lot of the value in the cost of rehabbing the property itself,” Edgar says.

Source: National Association of Realtors